Understanding a community's past, analyzing its present, and articulating its residents' vision for the future: these three elements make up a process known as "Visioning." This process is a key step in creating a Community Development Plan.

The purpose of the Visioning phase is to identify the points on which residents agree and disagree, and to build a common framework through listening and dialogue. That framework will shape the subsequent stages of the community planning process.

PLANNING BASICS

In any community, change is inevitable. You can either seek to guide change, or you can just sit back and let it happen. Choices must be made, because "not to decide is to decide."

Goal-setting is an essential element of good planning. The more clearly you can define the needs of your community, the more effective the entire planning process will be.

During the "Visioning" phase of the Community Development Planning process, the community develops a set of goals and priorities. No matter what your specific needs are determined to be, awareness of the following basic planning themes will help to focus the Visioning process:

- Develop a community-based planning process with broad participation.
- Promote interlocal cooperation.
- Provide housing across a broad range of income levels.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas, conserve open space, and preserve the historic built environment.
- Promote sustainable economic development.
- Provide for transportation that focuses on the movement of people and goods rather than automobiles; increase the use of alternatives to automobiles, including bikeways and pedestrian ways.
- Build on the character and individuality of Massachusetts communities.

Citizen participation

Making the planning process community-based, with broad citizen input, is a way to make sure that many voices and views are heard. Encourage active involvement. Communities that use consensus to set goals and objectives for the future find that the plan is easier to implement when complete.

Sample efforts

- *Visioning meetings*
- *Focus groups*
- *Neighborhood meetings*
- *Community surveys*
- *Citizen advisory committee meetings*

Effective strategies

- *Involve citizens early and consistently*
- *Be flexible, accommodating unique needs and situations in the community*
- *Be responsive to public input and communicate the final decision*
- *Involve business, environmental, civic and other interests*

Getting started

Here are some suggestions to help you get your community's planning process underway:

- Form a Planning Committee that is inclusive and representative of your community. If there is a Comprehensive (Master Plan) Committee in place and its members adequately represent the community's diversity, this committee could serve this function.
- Make GIS maps, buildout analysis and the community data profile (See Chapter A "Buildout Analysis, GIS Map and Community Data Profile for Your Community") available to committee members and residents.
- Decide if you want to hire a facilitator to help you in the Visioning process (See Section E "Choosing a Consultant").
- If you opt to self-facilitate, decide on the appropriate planning tool(s): brainstorming, charrette, etc., to develop your community's vision and goals and objectives (See Appendix AA "Facilitation Techniques for the Visioning Process").

Creating the Assets and Liabilities Inventory

An Assets and Liabilities Inventory is a way of depicting the current state of affairs in your community. It defines the current assets the community values and wants to preserve, and it can highlight weak or unfavorable aspects that the community wants to change.

An Assets and Liabilities Inventory should:

- Function as a "visual tour" of your community, to quickly communicate what citizens view as "assets" and "liabilities".
- Use maps, pictures, titles, graphs, and explanatory text to create a portrait of present conditions.
- Involve a broad group of citizens in gathering images and working together to develop the inventory.
- Serve as a tool to generate consensus support for planning goals.

The Assets and Liabilities Inventory is an excellent initial step in the community Visioning phase. The inventory will help you to focus on your community's current condition within the framework of the Community Development Plan's four core elements.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development considers the needs of future generations and recognizes the connectedness of social, economic and environmental goals. It encourages the location of development where services and infrastructure such as water, sewer, and transportation services are already available.

Each picture is worth a thousand words.

The community of Westwood recently completed a master planning process in which planning board members, equipped with disposable cameras, took pictures around town that captured the essence of the community. They presented the pictures at a public meeting and explained the reasons for selecting these pictures. The pictures were then displayed at the public library, and citizens were encouraged to comment and to suggest other assets/liabilities for depiction.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE ASSETS AND LIABILITIES, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CORE ELEMENTS

CORE ELEMENT	POSSIBLE ASSETS	POSSIBLE LIABILITIES
HOUSING	• Affordable housing • Historic homes • Elderly housing • Accessible housing • Cluster Development	• New development that is not affordable across a broad income range • New homes built on large lots • Deteriorated/vacant housing
OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE PROTECTION	• Open Space* • Water supply+ • Farmland • Parks • Rivers	• Contaminated former industrial land ("Brownfields") • Threatened water supply • New construction on formerly protected open space
TRANSPORTATION	• Commuter rail stop • Bus and/or rapid transit • Access to highways • Employer shuttle buses • Park and Ride lots	• Downtown congestion • Bridges needing repair • Underutilized mass transit • Land use inconsistent with transportation objectives or existing infrastructure
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	• Downtown business areas • Major employers • Industry • Village Centers • Usable Industrial and Commercial space	• Vacant storefronts • Vacant factories • Car dependent locations • Improperly sited growth • Growth incompatible with community's character • Long commute to available jobs

* Specify whether protected or unprotected
+ May be located in neighboring town

Developing the community's Vision Statement

The Visioning process culminates in an overall community "Vision Statement." The Vision Statement should be a very brief document -- usually not more than one to two pages -- that expresses the community's priority goals and objectives for each of the four core elements of the Community Development Plan: housing, economic development, open space and resource protection, and transportation.

While the development of the Vision Statement may be guided by the community's Planning Committee, it will require participation from the full range of community stakeholders. If the community has not chosen a professional consultant to act as facilitator, refer to Appendix AA "Facilitation Techniques for the Visioning Process" for examples of facilitation techniques that should be helpful in developing the Vision Statement.

Checking the reality of the Vision Statement

Once a community has gathered all relevant information, examined and understood the buildout map and analysis, and drafted a Vision Statement, it is time to check reality.

- Does the buildout analysis information and other data collected support the Vision Statement?
- Can the community realistically afford to reach the desired future?
- Is it feasible to accomplish the goals over the projected timeframe?

The DHCD website includes a "Growth Impact Handbook" http://www.state.ma.us/dhcd/publications/impac2.pdf designed to allow your community to examine its future. Data from your town accountant, which is filed each year with the Department of Revenue, will allow you to tailor your reality check with the actual relevant cost data.

Communities are strongly encouraged to work with professionals and volunteers in the community as they conduct the reality check. The results of the reality check should lead to identification of the gaps between the current plan and the desired future.

Review other local and regional planning documents to see if any of them have addressed the gaps you have identified. If one of the plans or studies does address the gaps, and the plan meets the criteria specified in Chapter D "Creating a Scope of Services", that plan can be submitted with the proposed Scope of Services for the Community Development Plan.

At the conclusion of the reality check process, the community should reexamine the Vision Statement, make any necessary changes, and include the statement in the CD Plan.

Participants in the Community Development Plan process

The list below identifies residents and organizations that can bring experience, perspective, and energy to the Community Development Plan process. In some communities, it may be useful to form subgroups working on specific issues relating to the four elements of the plan. In others, a "core" group might be formed, and this group could then host forums, hold "open mike" sessions, and/or meet with established community organizations to encourage a greater level of participation by more residents. The list is not all-inclusive, and is intended only as a starting point.

- *Municipal officials (e.g Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen, Mayor)*
- *Housing advocates*

Interlocal Cooperation

When neighboring towns work together during the planning process, everyone benefits. Funds can be pooled, interlocal needs can be addressed, and goals can be checked for compatibility. Cooperative planning is especially important with respect to several key areas: Many communities depend on water supplies beyond their own municipal boundaries. Water supply and protection concerns are major considerations in determining the immediate and long term impacts of development decisions.

For communities experiencing rapid growth, decisions regarding location of public facilities, infrastructure expansion, and transportation are likely to have direct or indirect impacts on neighboring cities and towns. For example, a group of communities may have a common need, such as public transportation for commuters.

Sample efforts
- Participating in a joint planning effort.
- Creating greenways and open space projects across boundaries.
- Extending sewer and water services across borders.
- Sharing services, equipment, and/or personnel.
- Participating in regional housing authority activities.
- Joint purchasing (i.e. fuel, school furniture, road salt, etc).

Strategies
- Involve neighboring communities early and consistently.
- Consider comments and plans of other jurisdictions. Be responsive to feedback.
- Use regional venues (e.g., RPAs, Watershed Associations, CDCs) to identify shared priorities and explore options for working together.

(continued from previous page)
- *Local/regional housing authority*
- *Elderly*
- *Young families*
- *Persons in poverty*
- *Middle-income families*
- *Civic organizations*
- *Religious community*
- *Local employers*
- *Builders*
- *Developers*
- *Community Development Corporations (CDCs)*
- *Realtors*
- *Human-service providers*
- *Municipal employees (public safety, teachers, highway department, etc.)*
- *High school and college students*
- *People from the workforce*
- *Seasonal residents*
- *Representatives from local and regional commercial and industrial interests*
- *Open space and resource protection advocates (Watershed Associations, Land Trusts, owners of significant tracts of land, and environmental groups)*